Chapter 1

As the Frigate Bird Flies

They lie spread across a vast expanse of ocean in the western Pacific. Their total land area amounts to little more than a thousand square miles. Geographers locate the vast majority of these islands and atolls as being north of the equator and west of the international date line. Considered by some to be among the most peripheral of peripheries, these island bodies nonetheless have been at the center of several of the more historically prominent events of this century. Tarawa, the Truk (now Chuuk) Lagoon, Guam, Saipan, Angaur, and Peleliu served as sites for some of the most vicious, destructive battles fought between Japanese and American military forces during the Second World War. Tinian, Bikini, Enewetak, and Kwajalein are important in the earliest chapters of the planet’s nuclear history.

World war and nuclear testing are but part of a deeper history of colonialism in the region, a history that in its broadest dimensions goes back centuries to Magellan’s 1521 landing on Guam and that is encapsulated in the very word “Micronesia.” The traditions of scientific discovery in an expansionist-minded Europe stipulated that new information about the world be officially incorporated into the existing corpus of knowledge by the use of appropriate, sanctioned designations in the classical languages. With Polynesia and Melanesia already bounded and labeled on European maps, there remained to be named the many small islands in the western Pacific described by the French voyager Jules Dumont d’Urville and earlier explorers. In 1831, the geographer Gregoire Louis Domeny de Rienzi asked for and received official approval from La Société de Géographie in Paris to call these islands “Micronesia.” The term, derived from the Greek and meaning “tiny islands,” marked in the minds of Domeny de Rienzi and others the most essential, distinguishing characteristic of the islands. Being more metaphorically blunt, a later European observer likened them to a “handful of chickpeas flung over the sea.”

Its more pejorative features notwithstanding, the designation “Micronesia”...
nesia” also evidenced the European world’s need to order, locate, name, and know these islands. The names of particular island groups within this area—the Carolines, Gilberts, Marianas, and Marshalls—represented not more indigenous conceptions of time, place, or identity, but existed rather as markers of earlier, more localized European activities that commemorated the names of Spanish royalty or British sea captains. Underneath all of these names lay still more local histories for which imperial travelers had little time, interest, or need. Having been named “Micronesia,” the islands would be further distinguished by proper adjectives that reflected more than three centuries of formal, varied, and changing colonial rule. Between 1668 and 1986, the islands, at different times, would be described as Spanish, British, Australian, German, Japanese, and American. British annexation in 1902 gave a different colonial history to the Gilberts or Kiribati, while Nauru passed from German to Australian control in 1914. Beginning in 1899, successive waves of German, Japanese, and American colonialism provided the Caroline, Marshall, and Northern Mariana Islands with a shared or bound-together experience. In each of these separate colonial possessions, there would be attempts to remake and re-present Micronesia in the images of its different colonizers, for purposes that had to do with national needs and global rivalries and through means that were essentially violent, exploitative, and racist.

I concern myself in this study with America’s attempts to remake Micronesia—more specifically, the Caroline, Marshall, and Northern Mariana Islands—in ways that reflected, served, and affirmed its particular national ideology. No clearer physical representation of this attempted domination exists than a map of the islands upon which is superimposed an outline of the United States map. Employed to make intelligible to North American audiences the vast distances over which the islands of Micronesia are spread, the map also suggests a dominance designed to be total. It is the extent and character of this dominance with which I am concerned in this book.

There has been no lack of criticism of America’s administration of Micronesia. In many ways, the explicitly political dimensions of America’s colonial relationship with the islands has proven the topic of greatest concern for academic experts and professional observers. These writers have emphasized the primacy of American strategic interests in the area and the ways in which those interests subverted America’s commitment, under the 1947 Trusteeship Agreement with the United Nations, to promote the political, economic, social, and educational development of the islands. These critics charge that the islands, rather than being developed,
were bought off or made over by overwhelming, crippling amounts of American largesse. “Americanized” is the gloss employed to indicate this supposed history of total abject colonization.

Dissatisfied by the limitations of this criticism and by the conventional, highly ethnocentric assumptions and tropes through which it has been delivered, I opt for a different tack. The focus of my research is not political issues per se but rather development, more particularly economic development, as a strategy of domination. A seemingly more benevolent, well-intentioned program of rule, the promotion of economic development presented a process of change no less disruptive and destructive than other colonial initiatives in its effects upon the peoples, places, and cultures of the area called Micronesia. If successful, the many and varied plans for development would have resulted in a total remaking of Micronesia.

There is, however, a rich, deeply entangled history in the gap between intent and effect over efforts at economic development in the area that
came to be officially known after 1947 as the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. I would like to lift a bit the blanket of American domination to see what else lies under it. We will find revealed not only the extent to which representatives of the United States government, in not always coordinated, consistent, or successful ways, sought to promote a transformation of life in the islands, but also local responses and understandings that took the agenda of development and applied it to more locally meaningful purposes and arrangements. My approach in this study, then, is to get beyond the liberal rhetoric that has surrounded the term “development,” to examine what it actually entailed, and to chart some of the ways in which it was appropriated and applied—often in multiple, complex, layered, and even conflicting ways—by local groups of island people. Much like the flight of the frigate bird, this study provides an overview of a distinctly American colonial process that sought to transform yet again a diverse collection of islands into a single administrative entity that served the interests of certain offices and agencies of the United States government. Such a summary approach admittedly comes at the expense of a fuller investigation into island histories and epistemologies. Hopefully, this study will encourage more local ethnographies of development among the islands called Micronesia. As further preface, I offer introductory comments on four key frames of analysis that inform this work: American ideology in the postwar period, economics as culture, development as discourse, and the counterhegemonic dimensions of what has been called “underdevelopment.”

American Ideology in the Postwar Period

Following Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Raymond Williams defines ideology as “an articulated system of meanings, values and beliefs” that can be abstracted to serve as a worldview for any social group. This definition will serve our purposes well enough, especially as we amend it to account for the historically specific circumstances of American colonialism in Micronesia. It is perhaps one of the functions of a national ideology to mask the crude objectives of self-interest and to deny the violence of conquest that precedes and makes possible the colonial act. In 1945, representatives of the United States government would behave no differently in their public pledges to provide for the welfare of a people who inhabited an area of prime strategic concern just seized from Japan through violent struggle. While recent and much needed attention to matters of division and diversity have problematized the meaning of the word “American” in the late twentieth century, it remains possible, I think, to speak of a dom-
inant, subsuming American ideological identity in the post–World War II period. Whatever their motivations and objectives, most white Americans believed deeply in the superiority of their way of life and in its essential appeal to others: assumptions about its inherent worth, goodness, and desirability all worked to justify America’s position of global primacy and to obscure the disruptive, even destructive consequences of that exercise of power on others.

Historian Thomas G. Paterson has written that Americans crafted from a consciousness of their historical experience a national ideology that integrated political and economic tenets into a “peace and prosperity” view of life. Through the Cold War period, Americans believed they were prosperous because they were democratic, and democratic because they were prosperous. In an extension of this view, American ideology held that peace and stability in the larger world were dependent upon economic prosperity and political democracy. Poverty, on the other hand, led to injustice, chaos, violence, and abusive political systems. Despite the hard counterrealities that disturbed the equation in terms of race, class, and gender relations, this dominant national ideology was used to justify and promote American interests and activities in the larger world. Thomas Gladwin, an anthropologist working in the islands during the first years of American rule, offered an earlier, more locally focused version of Paterson’s contention:

Americans have long been noted for their conviction that their political, social and economic philosophy is the best ever developed, not only for Americans but for everyone. This is nowhere so evident as in the administration of dependent peoples. It is sometimes extraordinarily difficult to persuade people that the institutions which have made the United States great may not fit Micronesian society at all.

Ernest Renan has written that “getting its history wrong is a part of being a nation.” It could be added, I think, that a nation’s misrepresentation of the past to its citizens, subjugated peoples, and a larger world audience constitutes an important prerequisite for and justification of colonialism.

Economics as Culture

The linking of peace, prosperity, and democracy in American minds concerned more than a simple matter of dollars and cents. It involved something deeper, something we might characterize as “cultural.” Other scholars have written about the essentially economic interests and meta-
phors that lie at the heart of American society. Charles Beard viewed the United States’ most fundamental political document, the Constitution, as an essentially economic program designed to ensure the commercial interests of its creators and their like-minded heirs. Adding an anthropological perspective to an idea borrowed from Marx and Engels’ The German Ideology, Marshall Sahlins argues that all production is ultimately concerned with the reproduction of a “definite mode of life.” In the West, most particularly the United States, there has emerged an essentially bourgeois capitalist ethic that places economic values and activities at the core of American life. American society, writes Sahlins, sees itself as logical, practical, rational and work-oriented, as a society in which individuals pursue through unfettered economic activities the satisfaction of their perceived needs and induced wants. We have, then, what Stephen Gude-
man has called “economics as culture.”

In the immediate postwar world, this very particular cultural bias toward the assumed virtues of productive economic activity carried over into American views of and dealings with the larger world, especially those non-Western areas of the globe whose beliefs and practices were informed by very different and localized ideologies about living in this world. Historian Greg Dening has written that cultures in their exposure to one another assert their structures of law and morality, present their rationalizing myths, and perform symbolic rituals expressive of their most fundamental beliefs about themselves. American efforts at economic development in Micronesia would reveal what it meant to be productive, prosperous and free, what it meant to be American. The need to assert this presentation as dominant precluded any possibility of understanding counterperformances presented by the various and distinctive groups of people who inhabited the area called Micronesia.

Involved in the presentation of this dominant ideology was the threat of hegemony, the obliteration or total make-over of other resident and indigenous systems of being. This fact was brought home to me in a very curious, initially puzzling way during the course of my research. While moving slowly through the 2,169 reels of microfilm on which are preserved the United States Trust Territory archives, I came across “How to Plant Coconuts,” a pamphlet produced by the Department of Agriculture on Saipan. The pamphlet, published in 1964 through the auspices of the South Pacific Commission as Agricultural Extension Circular 7, struck me as an odd document. The coconut tree has been a longstanding part of the physical environment in Micronesia; its uses remain many and varied, its place in the lore and material cultures of the islands deep and intimate.
Surely, even the most narrow-minded of colonial officials would know that the coconut was one crop of which Micronesians possessed a strong understanding and knowledge. It soon came to me, however, that the pamphlet was offering suggestions on the coconut as something other than a subsistence crop. Timing, spacing, access to sun and water, pruning, fertilization, and harvesting schedules were all a part of a process of commercializing this tree. The coconut, once a relatively ready and abundant natural resource with multiple uses and purposes that were cultural as well as economic, symbolic as well as material, was now being made into a commodity. By the norms expressed in Agricultural Extension Circular 7, coconuts were no longer available for the taking and using as they had once been. Their use became a strictly economic matter measured in terms of tonnage, shipping schedules, and prices. The pamphlet, written by two staff members of the Trust Territory Department of Agriculture, indicated, then, something of the major transformations in the everyday uses and perceptions of the physical and cultural environment that economic development would bring. In its own peculiar way, “How to Plant Coconuts” underscored the idea that economic development in Micronesia was also about more than the enhanced income to be earned from prudent planting, harvesting, and spacing of crops; it was about basic changes in the established way of doing things, about a major transformation in peoples’ relationships with their environment and with each other. It was about being made to become something else and other.

Development as a Discourse of Domination

Given the limitations of conventional political analysis and understandings of development, the question becomes how to approach colonialism differently in America’s Micronesia. Michel Foucault has written extensively about the ways in which the production of knowledge both reflects and supports the interests of the dominant, powerful, and governing groups in a society—more specifically, the state. The things with which government is concerned, wrote Foucault,

are men, but men in their relations, in their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc.; men in their relation to other kinds of things which are customs, habits, ways of doing and thinking, etc; lastly, men in their relation to that other kind of things [sic] which are accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, etc.12
Disciplinary or managing technology, drawn from the empirical sciences and with a strong statistical orientation, is employed to reshape the populace into a docile body that can be monitored, controlled, transformed, and directed toward the purposes of the state. Since Western society has become largely capitalist in character, the concerns of the state focus on the methods and profits of production, and with considerable effect. From the history of capitalism in the West emerges “homo economicus,” a normalized, controlled subject who produces under certain conditions to satisfy perceived needs and imposed requirements. The lives of economic men and women of the West are now mediated by the constructs of the market and the process of production. Economization has touched almost all aspects of life, including personal relationships, human biology, and even dealings with the natural world.

Although Foucault did not concern himself specifically with issues of imperialism and colonialism, the extension of his ideas into these areas would seem a natural and desirable undertaking. I am suggesting, then, an analytical approach that borrows selectively from Michel Foucault and that treats development and its accompanying arsenal of tropes not so much as a measurable or quantifiable endeavor, a question of econometrics if you will, but rather as discourse that possesses the power to create or recreate reality in colonized settings through acts of representation and prescription. With reference to American efforts at economic development, I use the word “discourse,” then, to include all of the recorded speeches, conversations, and debates as well as books, reports, plans, studies, and policy statements through which various individuals, offices, and agencies sought to make another, assumedly better, and more familiar Micronesia. In analyzing development as a discourse, I draw heavily on the works of Gustavo Esteva and Arturo Escobar.

Esteva has begun a more critical reexamination of development as discourse by providing a genealogical history of the word itself that documents the changes in its meanings and applications over time. Originally referenced to a pre-Enlightenment conception of the movement of nature to a more appropriate form of being, the term “development” came to assume a more modern meaning heavily affected by nineteenth-century ideas of evolution and history. Development now meant transformation toward an ever more perfect state that reflected the influence of both the Hegelian concept of history and the Darwinian notion of evolution. Marx employed the term as a keyword in his historical analysis of capitalism, giving it a decidedly pronounced political character. Applied to colonial
situations of the nineteenth century, development became a conceptualizing tool for measuring native peoples against the standards of Western civilization. By the early decades of the twentieth century, the word “development” was most often employed to refer to the productive capabilities of a colonized population that could be employed in the establishment of a modern market economy.14

The tensions and rivalries of the post–World War II world made economic stagnation and backwardness a threatening, dangerous condition for the capitalist West, particularly the United States. The program of modernity or development for those areas of the world now characterized as “underdeveloped” is seen as lying at the core of President Harry S. Truman’s “fair deal” speech before the United Nations on 20 January 1949. Esteva describes the general reception to Truman’s speech in the following words:

Never before had a word been so universally accepted on the very day of its political coinage. A new perception of one’s own self, and of the other, was suddenly created. Two hundred years of social construction of the historical-political meaning of the term “development” were successfully usurped and transmogrified. A political and philosophical proposition of Marx, packaged American style as a struggle against communism and at the service of the hegemonic design of the United States, succeeded in permeating both the popular and intellectual mind of the rest of the century.15

Esteva holds the legacy of that speech and its ideas to be a lifetime of subordination and betrayal, of discrimination and subjugation, for two-thirds of the world’s people.16 The island peoples of Micronesia certainly would come to experience the power and politics behind Truman’s plans for the underdeveloped world.

The power of development as a discursive force capable of both interpreting and controlling much of the non-Western world is demonstrated convincingly in Arturo Escobar’s Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World. Escobar writes of Truman’s “fair deal” for all as a call for development, a development concerned with replicating the features that distinguished the more advanced nations of the capitalist, postwar West the world over. These distinguishing features included industrialization, urbanization, high levels of technology, an affluent material culture, and specific, value-laden structures of educa-
tion and cultural expression. What this particular vision of the world really entailed, believes Escobar, was but another, albeit more totalizing and global colonization of reality.\textsuperscript{17}

The discourse of development coming out of the West constituted a form of Orientalism in which the underdeveloped world of the postwar period came to be known and controlled through the writing, describing, interpreting, and teaching of it and by experts whose tools of measurement reflected the rationality and logic of their own very privileged, powerful world. Escobar writes that the alleged desirability of development contributed significantly to a process of institutionalization that included the appearance of international funding agencies, foreign aid bureaucracies, career specialists, and programs of study that offered degrees in developmental studies. Development’s assumed necessity helped justify a multiplicity of governmental interventions into areas of life deemed in need of more accelerated modernization. There evolved a “devspeak” or “devthink” that showed itself universalizing and Eurocentric in its presumptions about the ease with which poor countries could follow the path to development. Development, however, was about far more than figures, graphs, tables, statistics, and equations. Its ultimate significance lay in its power as discourse to create a reality through the representing of it. Development, then, offered the prospect of a more effective hegemony in its discursive homogenization and systemization for knowing and hence controlling the “Third World.”\textsuperscript{18}

Understanding development as discourse offers, I believe, a more insightful approach to the study of American colonialism in Micronesia. The end of World War II would bring the islands directly under the control of the world’s then reigning superpower. Because the area was so deeply identified by military planners as being an integral part of American defense concerns and, by projection, world capitalism, the United States government, more particularly the Department of War, possessed a totalizing concern for Micronesia. By promoting the process of development, military and later civilian leaders were able to address certain humanitarian concerns about progress and betterment while at the same time ensuring that Micronesia would be remade in ways that served the strategic interests of the larger American state. This normalization of the islands and their people made possible the identification of anomalies, anomalies that theoretically could be isolated and then controlled through the corrective and therapeutic technology that was economic development. Economic development would be one of the techniques of power, one of the dividing practices, employed to rationalize American
domination of the islands. Micronesians would indeed have a reason to fear what Max Weber termed the "mighty cosmos of the modern economic order . . . the iron cage [in which] specialists without spirit, sensu-alists without heart [are] caught in the delusion that [they] have achieved a level of development never before attained by mankind."19

The Counterhegemonic Dimensions of Underdevelopment

As Esteva and Escobar both acknowledge, a discursive approach to development and its hegemonizing potential risks relegating the "peoples of the periphery" to the role of passive victims or mute witnesses to the gross commodification of their way of life. Foucault’s work, on the surface at least, seems to acknowledge little or no possibility of resistance or counterhegemonic discourses. This concern over the denial of engagement on the part of colonized or affected people is shared by James Scott, who finds Antonio Gramsci’s highly influential theory of hegemony equally wanting because of the assumptions it makes about the submission, acceptance, and complicity of subordinated classes in their own domination.20 In like critical voice, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff note that the essence of colonization is now assumed to lie

less in political overrule than in seizing and transforming “others” by the very act of conceptualizing, inscribing, and interacting with them on terms not of their choosing; in making them into the pliant objects and silenced subjects of our scripts and scenarios; in assuming to “represent” them, the active verb itself conflating politics and poetics.21

But where, the Comaroffs ask, does such a total, Gramscian-like conceptualization of colonialism allow for a consideration of the consciousness of the colonized? The question is certainly germane to our study of economic development in American Micronesia. There were Micronesians who engaged the discourse of development, and, in some instances, countered that discourse with visions of their own. Through a reading of correspondence, reports, minutes of meetings, and transcribed debates, we can learn something of the discourses of educated, elected, or otherwise elite Micronesian males over programs of development. There must be other discursively sensitive methodologies, however, that will allow us broader insights into on-site encounters with development, including the spaces for resistance or local appropriation that are created by less-than-complete or -successful projects of economic transformation.

The Comaroffs’ answer to their own question rests with a particular
concept of culture, a concept that takes culture to be the contested space of signifying practices or semantic ground on which human beings “seek to construct and represent themselves and others—and, hence, society and history.” The Comaroffs, then, offer a historically attuned notion of culture that includes others as well as selves, actions as well as signs, creativity as well as mimesis, and empowerment as well as subjugation. This empowerment, they hasten to add, shows itself at different times and in varied ways that often defy simple romanticized Western notions of colonial resistance.22

Marshall Sahlins, a colleague of the Comaroffs at the University of Chicago, makes many of the same points for the Pacific, and with specific reference to the issue of economic development. Sahlins describes a local Pacific variant to development—namely, “develop-man,” meaning both the material and social enrichment of local lifestyles.23 Sahlins defines the term “develop-man” as capturing the spirit behind indigenous ways of coping with capitalism. Pacific peoples are neither awed nor overwhelmed by external systems beyond their control. Their response is rather to appropriate. Such pragmatic behavior lies at the heart of every cultural scheme known to history. The impulse of local people in the Pacific and elsewhere, writes Sahlins, is not to become like us, but to become more like themselves. Living in cultural systems still concerned with the relationships of kith and kin, Pacific peoples employ Western goods to aid in the fulfillment of the obligations these social arrangements entail.

Playing with Hegel a bit, Sahlins writes that the “cunning of culture” thus mediates the invisible hand of the market economy. Modern economic rationality is transformed by a different cultural rationality that can show itself in extravagant traditional ceremonies replete with all manner of Western goods ranging from rolls of cloth to bags of rice, basins of canned goods, cases of beer, and money trees.24 Local culture, then, displays itself on an exaggerated, more materially and symbolically enriched scale; what development specialists or economists might call “waste” or “backwardness” is actually a form of cultural enhancement determined by local values and logic. Such an interpretation is not to deny the more pragmatic or utilitarian aspects of consumption; people do seek advantage, utility, and satisfaction in their commerce. These transactions, however, cannot be wholly or simply measured in terms of dollars and cents or judged apart from the local histories, politics, and cultural systems that add meaning, significance, and value to the process.25

There are then, as exemplified in Sahlins’ concept of develop-man, dif-
ferent systems of logic and rationality that allow for the emergence of other local discourses about development. Stephen Gudeman says much the same thing in his ethnographic analysis of house economics in Colombia. Gudeman examines the cultural and historical contexts that have made the house a site of convergence where local economics interact with capitalist modes of thought and production. The result is a “thick combination” where culturally informed innovations occur in remarkably effective, reasonably profitable, and socially appropriate ways.  

Escobar, Esteva, Gudeman, and Sahlins all encourage us to look for other models of economy that “are no less scientific because they are not couched in equations or produced by Nobel laureates.” The global capitalist system, then, is really the expression of a relative and particular cultural logic, whose distinguishing features lie deeply embedded in the European past. Although advocates of a world systems approach might reduce all history to stages of capitalism, a more ethnographic study of encounters that concerns itself with local concepts of status, kinship, labor, productivity, exchange, and consumption would suggest other, more nuanced and diverse interpretations.  

Against a simple history of world capitalism, Sahlins writes of encounters involving “cosmologies of capitalism” in which the modern global order is engaged in many and complex ways by so-called peripheral peoples and their persisting systems of distinctive cultural logic.

An important qualification—one that Sahlins and other writers cited in this introduction readily acknowledge—needs to be appended to the argument of cultural persistence as political resistance. Encounters with modernity do not always end successfully or even in compromise. Apart from the efforts at domination by colonial or neocolonial forces are the structural and historical entanglements created by increasingly involved, even dependent relations with the system of world capitalism.  

Efforts at appropriation by the parties involved in an encounter may be mutual, but they are also unequal given the factors of wealth and power that privilege the global. Moreover, inequalities within local systems resulting from specific histories and practices work to the advantage of some and not others. Witness the disturbance and suffering caused by nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands and the more recent efforts of the Marshallese government to capitalize on them; or consider the efforts from both within and beyond Palau to subvert the antinuclear provisions of the Palauan constitution. A history of colonialism in American Micronesia must account for these sad conflicts as well; there is no simple story that is only about external efforts at domination and local means of resistance.
A Different Plan for Examining Economic Development in Micronesia

I contend that the history of economic development in American Micronesia is not to be found solely in the shrill statistics of Trust Territory administrators, federal officials, or United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) specialists. I begin my task by examining the politics of representation that permeate descriptions of the wartime occupation of the islands and the first years of American military government. I review the artificiality of the colonial and neocolonial construct that was and is Micronesia, and the inability of Americans to give credence or even consideration to the vitality and distinctiveness of local island worlds, their unique systems of social organization, and the cultural principles that shaped and directed them. Detailed also are the effects of war and the massive infusion of men, technology, and war goods on indigenous orders where exchange tended to be expressive of social relations and political hierarchies and where the presence of foreigners and foreign goods involved complicated, stressful negotiations with existing systems of power, hierarchy, and status. In this chapter, I rely on Dorothy Richard’s official history of the United States Navy’s occupation and administration of the islands. Richard’s three-volume text is instructive not only for the facts and figures it relates, but for its inadvertent display of the attitudes, assumptions, and prejudices that informed the navy government and its efforts at economic development.

In these first formative encounters between Americans and the people they called Micronesians, images were formed and set, given an almost canonical legitimacy that would explain at once the necessity for economic development in the islands and the reasons for the failure of those efforts. Micronesians were described as quaint, happy, but backward people who no longer could afford to enjoy the luxury of living apart from the larger global order. The irony was that Americans created dependency, or what seemed to them to be dependency, through the imposition of programs calculated to make Micronesians economically self-reliant. A paradox also showed itself in this earliest literature on American rule; namely, a recognition of the impossibility of creating a viable, local, Western-style economy, and yet the need, for purposes of domestic and international legitimation, to make the effort. Distance, isolation, climate, the calumnies of previous colonial regimes, the lack of exploitable resources, and, most important, the perceived unwillingness and inability of the different island peoples came to constitute a litany that would be articulated by many among the succeeding generations of administrators, planners, visitors, and developmental specialists from 1944 to 1982. This litany
expressed both frustration and consolation for those who enunciated it—frustration at the many failed efforts at development and consolation that, in the end, these failures resulted from factors involving local environments and peoples.

Chapter 3, dealing with the U.S. Navy’s administration of the islands under the 1947 Trusteeship Agreement, underscores the close, admitted link between security and economic development that was obscured but remained nonetheless salient in subsequent decades. The navy’s efforts at a variety of economic development projects are examined, with special attention given the rationale for the efforts and the explanations for their failure. Chapter 4 examines three prescriptions or texts for economic development: the political motivations that inspired them, the very distinct and particular assumptions about living and being in this world that they embraced, and the highly ethnocentric, powerfully discursive notion of planning itself. International consultants, Trust Territory officials, and on-site administrators often paid verbal homage to the need for cultural sensitivity; at the same time, these individuals often cited the word “culture” to explain the failure of development efforts in such fields as fishing, tourism, and agriculture. Making use of local stories and selected ethnographic studies, I also attempt in chapter 4 to suggest something of the historical and cultural realities that confronted and confounded development initiatives in these areas.

Chapter 5 focuses on Micronesian discourses surrounding the issue of economic development: here, I draw heavily from the records of the Congress of Micronesia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although Micronesian reservations are expressed at least officially in English and using theories, metaphors, examples, and references that seem to have a decidedly liberal American character to them, I argue, borrowing from the work of Ranajit Guha and his subaltern studies program, that these expressions of reservation, doubt, and grievance reflect in part attempts to co-opt the language, ideas, and principles of the hegemonizer for more local purposes.30

As noted previously, one of the tropes of recent Pacific studies has been the tendency to slip into Manichean representations that presume a stark opposition in the encounters between islands and continent. Chapter 6 concerns the debate, largely within Micronesia and among Micronesians, about increased levels of U.S. federal assistance and their effects on Micronesian societies and political aspirations. Through an examination of the debates in and around these federal assistance programs, the complexity, variety, and even ambiguity of Micronesian responses begins to
emerge. Chapter 7 pursues this issue by examining the history of nuclear testing in the Marshalls and the disruption and division it caused within Marshallese society. In the Marshalls, the dominant discourse of development took on a decidedly different character. Rather than a seductive, misleading advertisement for a better future, development proved to be a belated, condescending, grossly insufficient form of compensation for the social, physical, and environmental havoc caused by an American nuclear testing program that would not wait for any tomorrows. As conclusion, chapter 8 considers the ways in which the compacts of free association between the American and different Micronesian governments have sought to sustain American dominance in the region through the continuing discourse of development and developmental funding. This chapter also uses the review of a recent book on Micronesia, *The Edge of Paradise*, to reveal the gulf between liberal despair over the course of economic development in the islands and more locally determined efforts to manipulate developmental projects for very different purposes.

In bringing this introduction to a close, I should add a few qualifying statements about my relationship to certain words and topics. As I implied earlier, the terms “Micronesia,” “Micronesian,” and “Micronesians” are far more reflective of colonizing forces than of ethnographic realities. Nonetheless, their usage is difficult to avoid in a study that concerns itself in part with colonial knowledge, policy, and administration. The employment of these words, however, can also hint at other understandings. These normalizing labels were at times appropriated by the very people upon whom they were imposed to speak of shared colonial histories and common developmental dilemmas. The subjugated thus addressed their rulers through the referents of colonization, but with purposes that could at times be countercolonial in nature. My decision to use the words “Micronesia,” “Micronesian,” and “Micronesians” results, then, from a desire to acknowledge local manipulations as well as from more pragmatic stylistic concerns.

Similarly, I have been somewhat relaxed in my use of the word “American” and the phrase “American colonialism.” These words obscure a complexity and variation in the American colonial presence in Micronesia that needs to be noted. In an enthusiasm to discover local responses to Western domination, we too quickly reduce and simplify that which, despite a seemingly coherent agenda of possession and control, is not easily reduced or simplified. In *Colonialism’s Culture*, Nicholas Thomas writes against a perception of colonialism as monolithic in character, purposes, personalities, and efficiency. He argues for a recognition of colonialism
that is more sophisticated, localized, and also nuanced regarding the
diverse, often conflicting agendas and approaches advanced by different
groups from a single colonizing nation.31

Thomas’ caution is well taken. In this account of the history of eco-
nomic development in American Micronesia, I strive to represent the
diversity, debate, and contentiousness among different groups of Amer-
icans involved in the economic development of the islands. Military
administrators, missionaries, educators, Trust Territory officials, Peace
Corps volunteers, expatriate businesspeople, and representatives from
U.S. governmental agencies in Washington, D.C., were not one in their
attitudes and opinions toward Micronesians and toward economic devel-
opment within Micronesia. A good history of economic development in
Micronesia, then, needs to heed Greg Dening and Paul Rabinow in their
calls for studies that provide ethnographic perspectives on the colonizers
as well as the colonized.32 At the same time, and this I believe is testament
to the power of the word “development” and the ideas behind it, almost all
groups of Americans expressed a belief in the need to promote a better life
for Micronesians. This paradox of unanimity within diversity is one of the
more striking features of the colonizing discourse of development in
Micronesia.

It is important also to note the decidedly patriarchal, sexist character
of development. More than two decades ago Ester Boserup showed how
programs of development directed from metropolitan sites have worked to
deny the extent and significance of women’s economic roles.33 Reflecting
the pronounced male bias of Western colonial regimes toward women’s
roles, this denial did not necessarily end or even diminish women’s local
economic obligations; they continued amidst a host of new economic
pressures and expectations. More often than not, women’s work was at
once increased and denigrated by policies that encouraged employment
in the more menial areas of developing economies.

Micronesia would prove no exception to this pattern. Francis X. Hezel,
S.J., writes about the overwhelmingly “masculine and mechanical” feel to
the makeshift towns of quonset huts that sprang up around American
military bases in the months immediately following the seizure of the
islands from Japan.34 These same adjectives would characterize Amer-
ica’s later civilian administration of the islands and the process of eco-
nomic development it sought to engender. Beginning in 1947, the U.S.
Department of State’s annual reports to the United Nations Trusteeship
Council asserted the equality of women with men under the law. At the
same time, these reports often pointed to persisting “traditional patterns”
that relegated women to subordinate positions in Micronesian societies. To read these documents, the blame for discrimination against women belonged solely to Micronesian societies.

Employment statistics provided by the territorial administration, however, belied these claims of equality and equal opportunity: women worked as nurses, secretaries, clerks, and teachers and at levels of compensation considerably below the earnings of men in like or related categories of employment. As employment opportunities for Micronesians increased over the course of the Trust Territory administration, positions of leadership and responsibility went almost exclusively to men. Development in Micronesia, then, proved a largely sexist project that sought to replicate a patriarchal capitalist economy among colonized island peoples. Still, we need to remind ourselves of the long-standing centrality of women in these island economies, the continuing if not expanding significance of their economic contributions, and the increasingly more public profile being exhibited by women over a host of development-related issues.35 I have endeavored where possible to indicate something of Micronesian women’s responses to development and development-related issues, including the successful efforts of women in Chuuk to address the serious problem of alcohol abuse there in the late 1970s.

I should mention here other decisions involving more practical and stylistic matters. Throughout this study, I have employed the more modern orthographic renderings of major Micronesian islands or island groups. I use Chuuk, Kosrae, and Pohnpei rather than Truk, Kusaie, and Ponape, respectively. My use of quotations from historical documents and my references to the large body of literature produced on the islands over the last century or so make the elimination of the older spellings impossible, however. Given the temporal, geographic, and thematic sweep of this study, I have also had to make decisions about parameters. I have elected, for example, not to include an examination of the mid-1970s debate over the construction of a superport in Palau36 designed to facilitate the transshipment of crude oil from the Middle East to Japan. The central issues around the superport involved not struggles over colonially directed policies of development but struggles with more global forces of capitalism that sought not the remaking of people but the pursuit of profit and the direct exploitation of the natural environment.

The time period under consideration also requires some explanation. I open this study in 1944, when the United States began its violent seizure of the area from Japan. The possessing of these islands through war provided a necessary preface for the establishment of formal colonial rule.
The choice of 1982 as the concluding date for this study might strike some as perplexing (or odd). After all, the formal termination of the Trust Territory government’s jurisdiction over the Caroline and Marshall Islands did not occur until November 1986, when the United States declared operative the compacts of free association with what are now the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The Republic of Palau did not emerge as a self-governing entity under its own agreement of free association until October 1994, and this after a long, confounding, tortuous, and sometimes violent process of ratification that endeavored to reconcile continuing American strategic interests with the antinuclear provisions of Palau’s constitution. Despite the logic of extending this study to accommodate the approval and implementation of the compacts, I believe that the actual terms of free association, finalized in 1982 through separate negotiations between representatives of the United States and the different Micronesian governments, display in striking relief the past and future purposes of economic development in the islands.

Finally, I find myself compelled to say something about the larger significance of this work. There are those who would think a history of economic development in American Micronesia from 1944 to 1982 is “micro” indeed—“micro” in its relation to larger issues and events in the world. But there is, I argue, a broader, wider-reaching relevance to this study. Efforts at economic development in the area called Micronesia were ultimately about transforming in dramatic and total fashion a people who occupied real estate deemed vital to American strategic concerns. As inhabitants of islands with many, varied, and different cultural systems, they were discovered to be “other”; their otherness came to be seen as inconsistent with, even threatening to American interests. And so economic development became a strategy designed to provide a new, more comfortable, malleable, and reassuring identity for the inhabitants of this prime piece of strategic real estate. Underneath the liberal rhetoric that surrounded arguments, proposals, and programs for economic development was a deeper purpose: dominant interests in American society would be made more secure, reaffirmed in their privilege and dominance, and sustained in their self-image by the remaking of these islands into places that had the look, feel, sound, speed, smell, and taste of America about them. The remaking of Micronesia and Micronesians is, in part, about the way dominant systems of power preserve themselves. Micronesians have much in common, then, with other groups of people who have had modernity thrust upon them and who have experienced the
consequent normalizing, controlling pressures behind programs of capitalist cultural development that seek at once to indict and obliterate difference in favor of efficiency, conformity, and gain.

It is not only present conditions in “underdeveloped” worlds such as Micronesia that are found wanting. The imposition of development also involves the denial of history as well as the remaking of contemporary physical and cultural landscapes. As Fredric Jameson has noted, development does not allow for a history outside that of the West; development seeks to complete the colonial project by defining non-Western areas solely in terms of the experience of colonialism.\textsuperscript{37} History as practiced in and by the West becomes a part of the colonizing process in its sacrifice of other peoples’ pasts to the demanding god of progress.\textsuperscript{38} Getting beyond development as a discursive strategy of domination and control entails a recognition of other ways of knowing, being, and living. Recognizing development as part of a larger colonial project that disavows racial, cultural, and historical difference invites an anticolonial discourse that “requires an alternative set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it.”\textsuperscript{39} I offer, then, this study in support of future histories and ethnographies that are more locally ordered and meaningful.